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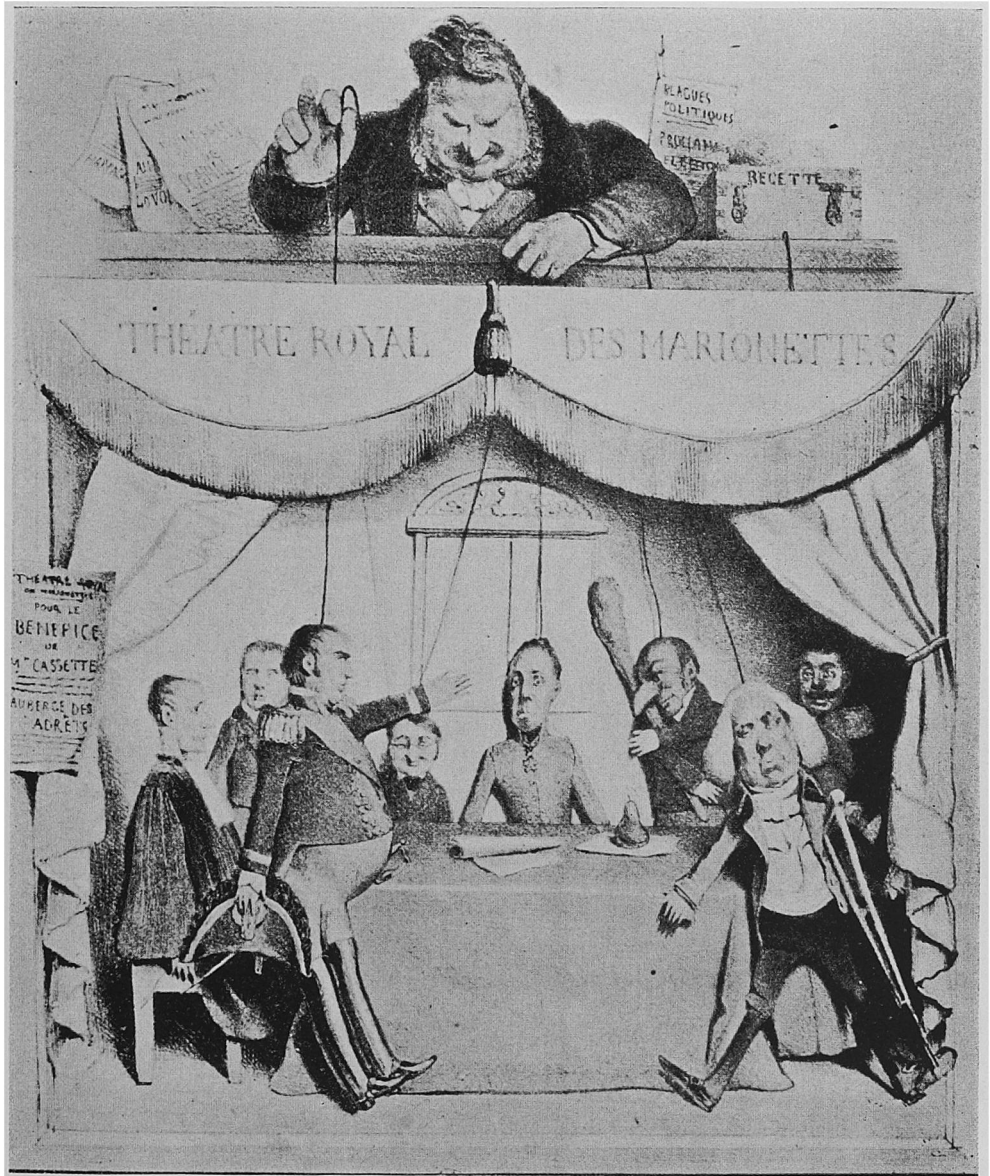
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PULLING THE WIRES

The idea of Marionettes was frequently used by political cartoonists in the last century.—From *Caricature*, 1834.

MARIONETTES

By J. LEVIEU

“WHO loves not puppets is not fit to live,” said Byron.

This appreciation may appear to us a little exaggerated, but it is certain that in all times marionettes have had fervent admirers. Their vogue is a little dimmed at present. But may we not assist some day in its revival?

Does not Michel Delines, in one of his recent theatrical articles in *Le Temps*, tell us that Gordon Craig, the English reformer of the theatre, thought well of replacing actors by marionettes, who would at least have the merit of never killing either the thought or the intention of the author.

This also seemed to be the opinion of Anatole France who, more than twenty years ago, wrote: “To be frank, actors spoil comedy for me. I mean good actors. I can still get along with the others, but excellent artists like those of the Comédie Française, I can hardly endure. Their talent is too great: they pervade everything. Their personality effaces the work which they represent.”

Whether one prefers actors to marionettes, or rather to their exhibitors, or whether one is of contrary opinion, it is certain that marionettes have existed for more than two thousand years. They began by being sacerdotal in Egypt where the statues of the gods were jointed so that they could play a real part in religious ceremonies. In Greece and in Rome, after having amused the children, they diverted their elders. There were in Greece a great many marionette-players, or “ne’vropastes,” having theatres in the cities where they gave performances.

Pothin is the only one whose name has come down to us. The Greeks, like the Romans, arrived at a rare perfection in the mechanism of their puppets; for sometimes not only their limbs were articulated, but even their spines were movable and could be bent to all attitudes.

If the history of marionettes is obscure during the first centuries which followed the fall of the Roman Empire, it is certain that they did not perish with it, since in a manuscript of the XII century, *Hortus Deliciarum*, by Herrade de Landsberg, one of the miniatures represents a duel scene, where marionettes are the actors.

The name “Marionettes” is a diminutive of “Marion,” which is itself a diminutive of “Marie,” and was employed, beginning with the XV century, to designate the statues of the saints. It was only at the end of the XVI century that it took a more profane meaning and served to designate the popular articulated dolls.

As to Punchinello, he came into the world towards the middle of the XVII century. His godfather was probably Jean Brioché, who had installed a marionette theatre on the left bank of the Seine, at the Porte de Nesle, and who joined to this profession that of dentist, or, to put it more modestly, a puller of teeth.

The popularity of Brioché’s was considerable. In 1669 he was commanded to give performances, for three months, at Saint-Germain-en-Laye, at the court of the Dauphin, for which performances he received 1,365 livres. He had been pre-

ceded by another marionette showman who had received 820 livres for a six weeks' engagement.

Several years later, a celebrated manufacturer of marionettes, Alexandre Bertrand, who furnished nearly all the figures, wished, in his turn, to present them in a theatre of his own, in which he had the idea of having appear with them, as actors, several children. The comedians complained loudly, asserting that this encroached upon their privileges, and they succeeded so well that Bertrand's theatre disappeared in 1690.

When the galleries of the Palais Royal and the Boulevard du Temple became permanent fairs, the marionette showmen left the temporary fairs, some for the more popular Boulevard du Temple, some for the more elegant Palais Royal.

But at about this time, the marionettes, after having triumphed over their enemies the comedians, were themselves supplanted by the Chinese shadow plays.

In 1775 the first shadow theatre opened under the name of *The Chinese Recreation Theatre*. Several years later, in 1784, Dominique Séraphin left Versailles to instal under the galleries of the Palais Royal his shadow theatre which, under his management and that of his successors, did not close its doors until 1858.

Dislodged from the temporary fairs, unable to struggle against the marionette shows of the Boulevard du Temple or of the Palais Royal, Punchinello emigrated in the last years of the XVIII century to the Champs-Élysées, which he has never left.

We spoke at the beginning of Byron's enthusiasm for the English marionettes.

It is a taste which his countrymen have always shared. As in all other countries, they were originally in England a miniature enactment of the "mysteries." To the "mysteries" succeeded the "moralities," pieces in which the vices and the virtues were personified, and to the moralities succeeded profane pieces, performed with all sorts of scenic luxury. From that time the taste for "puppets" spread more and more over all England.

Punch, the celebrated Punch, made his appearance only a few years later, and the rather severe repertory of the puppets became more lively. Still later they became satirical. No sooner did any important event take place in England than Punch gave his opinion of it, not always a complimentary one.

He has, besides, given his name to a magazine, famous for its biting wit.

Such are the glorious careers of the marionettes in those countries where their social rôle has been the most important.

Surely we may regret their almost entire disappearance. But do we not always prefer a play well interpreted by actors to the same play performed by marionettes. It is only natural that theatrical authors should sometimes be of another opinion; for an actor of temperament will always interpret a part as he himself feels it, and that will often be quite different from the conception of the author.

Several modern authors understand this so well that they have taken care to evade such a danger by writing certain rôles especially for actors best fitted to represent them.—*Les Idées Contemporaines, Paris.*